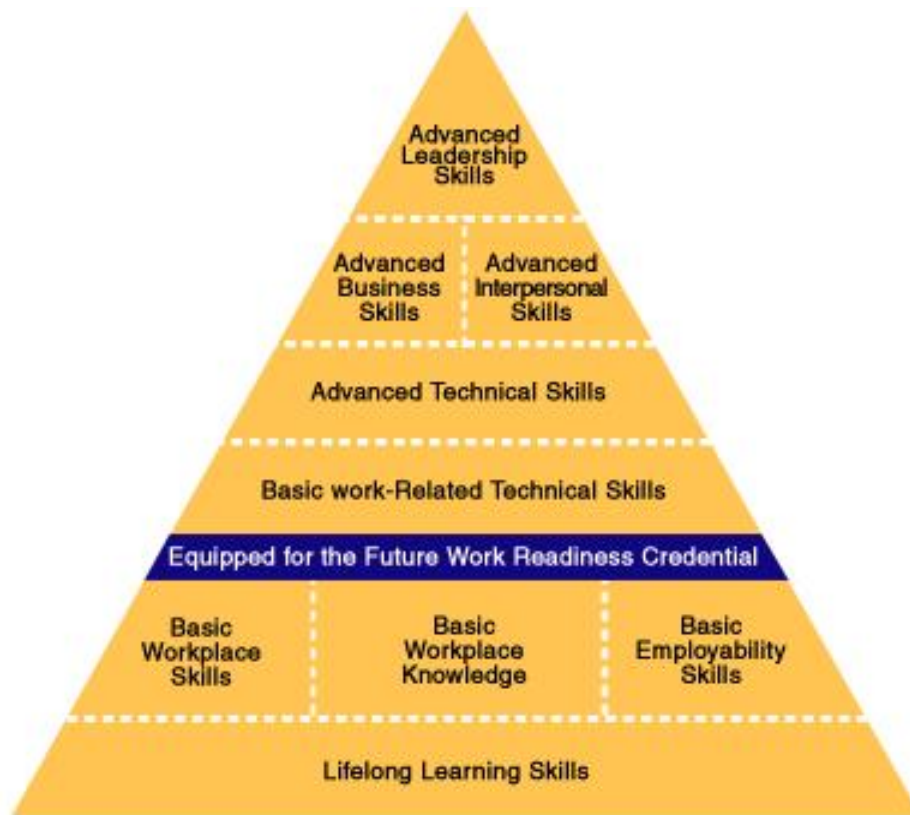


**Looking for the best solution to certifying work readiness?  
Take a look at the EFF Work Readiness Credential.**



***Created through a public-private partnership.***

In 2002 policy makers from four states joined together with the National Institute for Literacy and national business leaders<sup>1</sup> to find a solution to a problem brought to us by businesses in our communities.

- Too many applicants for entry-level jobs lacked the basic academic and employability skills that enabled them to be productive, contributing workers.
- The businesses could not count on the state's workforce boards and one stop career centers to reliably refer qualified entry-level workers to them.

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<sup>1</sup> The original investing partners in the WRC were the National Institute for Literacy, Workforce Florida, Inc., NJ Department of Labor, NY DOL, Washington State Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. Additional investing partners include: District of Columbia; Junior Achievement; and Rhode Island. National advisors include: Center for Workforce Development, Institute for Educational Leadership; Center for Workforce Preparation, U.S Chamber of Commerce; Center for Workforce Success, National Association of Manufacturers; National Association of Workforce Boards; National Governors Association; and National Retail Federation Foundation.

The President's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Initiative was aimed at addressing the basic academic skills gap. But how were we going to address the employability skills gap?

*Businesses defined the problem. So we asked business leaders from across industry clusters to define the solution.* Their answer: a valid, reliable, assessment-based certification of work readiness skills based on a national, portable standard of what entry level workers need to know and be able to do. And, they told us, businesses needed to be the primary definers of that entry-level standard.

***Built to the specifications of business...***

To find out what mattered on the frontline, we conducted a year-long research process in businesses within Florida, New Jersey, New York and Washington and then asked representatives of businesses, chambers, and industry associations from across the country to respond to our research results. The consensus was that what was important for entry-level workers was *a strong foundation of critical employability skills*: the ability to cooperate with others, the ability to communicate orally in English as well as to read and write; the ability to solve problems, to resolve conflicts, to take responsibility, to learn and adapt to change. [online link to profile]

***Built on SCANS, O\*NET and Equipped for the Future Applied Learning Standards.***

In 2002 the National Institute for Literacy was a logical convener for this effort. A small federal organization created by Congress in 1992, it had supported a 10-year national research effort in partnership with 17 states and the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor to develop the Equipped for the Future applied learning standards. These standards addressed more than traditional literacy skills: they addressed the full range of skills individuals needed to carry out their responsibilities as citizens, family members, and workers.

The Work Readiness Credential is built on this solid standards-based foundation, as well as more than a decade of work at the U.S. Department of Labor on SCANS and O\*NET, and years of work in states across the country building industry-specific skill standards. The WRC updates this work by asking businesses to define the critical tasks and behaviors that new-entry-level workers need to carry out - and the skills and knowledge most important to carrying them out.

***A US DOL Approved Common Measure for Youth***

Because we have conducted the research to define a work readiness standard, the assessment package we have had developed to assess this standard can - and will—result in a credential which we believe will become as universal as the GED. The difference will be that while the GED certifies a range and level of skills development equivalent to high school completion, our Work Readiness Credential certifies a level and range of skills development necessary for entry-

level work. Recognizing the value of the WRC, the U.S. DOL has approved our credential as a way to meet the credential common measure for youth.

***No Other Assessment Tools Address Entry-level Work Readiness.***

Once we knew how businesses defined entry-level work readiness, we set out to find assessment tools that would address the critical employability gap. That's when we discovered that there were not existing tools that could be used to certify the full range of employability skills businesses agree are critical to success on the first rung of the career ladder.

We discovered lots of good tools for other purposes. But not for certifying the skills of applicants for entry level jobs. If we were going to meet the needs of the businesses in our states, we needed to build our own assessment package.

The WRC assessments measure nine skills that employers agreed were critical to successful performance of entry-level work:

**Oral Communication Skills:** Speak so others can Understand; Listen Actively

**Interpersonal Skills:** Cooperate with Others, Resolve Conflict, and Negotiate

**Problem solving skills:** Solve Problems and Make Decisions

**Self Management and Learning Skills:** Take Responsibility for Learning

**Applied Foundation Skills:** Read with Understanding; Use Math to Solve Problems and Communicate; and Observe Critically.

These nine skills are organized into four assessment modules. They include WR-Read, WR-Math, WR-Situational Judgment, and WR-Oral Language. The first three are multiple choice assessments based on short work-based scenarios that the test taker responds to. The WR-Oral Language Test is a state-of-the-art listening and speaking performance test.

The whole test battery takes approximately 2.5 hours to complete. But each module (30-45 minutes) can be completed separately within a four week period.

***Built to work within the public workforce system.***

The assessments have been built to be delivered by computer, through a web-based system, to assure maximum accessibility, ease of use, and the necessary security to support a high stakes employability test. Testing sites can be in any kind of organization—from one stop career centers to community colleges to businesses - that have a small computer lab and someone to serve as a proctor for test takers. No specialized assessment knowledge is necessary.

***Rigorously developed to ensure a valid, reliable, legally defensible certification of entry-level work readiness***

When the credential assessments are released in June 2006 you will be able to count on them to reliably identify individuals who are work ready. We are in the final stages of the field test of these assessments so that we can affirm

with confidence, that they reliably and validly measure work readiness according to this business-defined standard.

Once the credential is operational we will continue to collect data on results so that we can be sure that the credential is really working to make the difference that matters to individual jobseekers and to businesses seeking qualified, work ready entry-level workers.

***Results: Better Accountability to Customers***

In building the Work Readiness Credential we identified four critical system needs:

- Streamline the hiring and training process for businesses by identifying a work-ready pool of job applicants.
- Provide a strong “first rung” work readiness certification for jobseekers - including immigrants, out-of-school youth, and adults with low literacy skills, including TANF recipients and ex offenders.
- Build a more efficient, more accountable pipeline for preparing individuals for work.
- Improve the ability of state and local Workforce Boards to refer qualified applicants for entry-level jobs.

***A more efficient pipeline for entry-level workers.***

Because our Work Readiness Credential is based on a business-defined work readiness standard, states and local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) can use it to build a more effective regional pipeline for producing well-qualified workers to meet the needs of current businesses in the region and new businesses states hope to attract. Local WIBs can hold education and training vendors accountable for assuring that program participants really are work ready when they leave a program. This means WIBs can be more accountable to their business customers - delivering the quality they need to be competitive in a global economy.

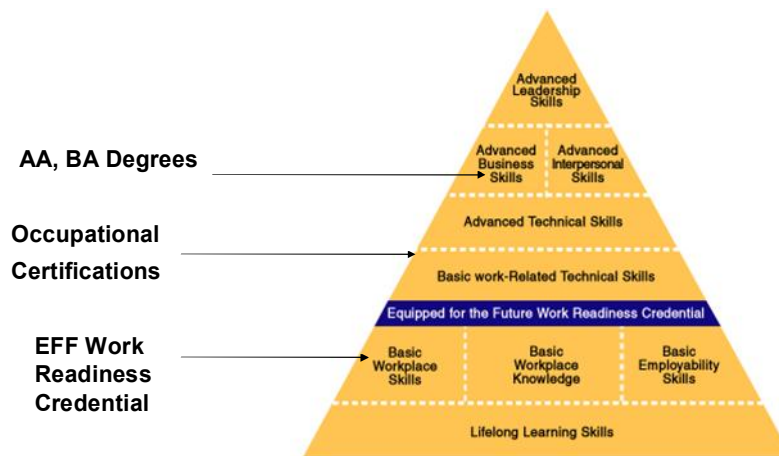
***A strong foundation for moving up the career ladder.***

The Work Readiness Credential is designed to complement the tools that WIBs and employers are already using to assess how well job applicants are prepared for specific jobs in specific industries or companies. Our credential assessments measure the skills needed to step with confidence onto the first rung of the career ladder.

States that are already using Work Keys as part of their services to match individuals to jobs will find that the Work Readiness Credential fills the gap Work Keys leaves when it comes to assessing entry-level employability skills like working with others, problem solving, and listening and speaking.

When it comes to assessing the technical skills needed to progress within specific sectors—from retail to health care to financial services to manufacturing—there are a range of excellent assessments already built to industry specific skill standards that states and employers will want to rely on. New assessments being built for high growth industry sectors can be constructed with confidence on the employability foundation the WRC measures.

## The Work Readiness Credential: A Common Foundation for Employability



For more information about the Work Readiness Credential visit our web site at [www.uschamber.com/cwp/strategies/workreadinesscredential.htm](http://www.uschamber.com/cwp/strategies/workreadinesscredential.htm)

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